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FM AMCONSUL MONTREAL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9968
INFO RUCNCCAN/ALCAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MONTREAL 000820

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM SOCI CASC CA

SUBJECT: Montreal Hosts the First Ever OutGames

¶1. Montreal is set to host the 1st World OutGames from July 26-August 5. An offshoot of the Federation of Gay Games (held this year in Chicago), which has traditionally focused on providing a venue for homosexuals to openly engage in sports competitions, the OutGames has added a three-day international conference on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) human rights issues to the sports competition. Consulate representatives met with the organizers who expect 1,500 conference participants from more than 100 countries, some 12,000 athletes/competitors, including 2,000 Americans, 300 foreign journalists, and as many as 250,000 visitors/spectators. To attract more LGBT visitors, Montreal tourism officials and businesses have deliberately developed marketing efforts to show and brand Montreal as a tolerant, gay-friendly vacation destination on par with Amsterdam, Paris, and San Francisco. Given the large number of Americans involved, Consulate officers also briefed the conference organizers on American Citizen Services and provided a welcome message and ACS/CIS reference page for distribution to American participants. Copenhagen has been designated as the host of the next World OutGames in 2009.

OUTGAMES OVERVIEW

¶2. The 1st World OutGames opens with the International Conference on LGBT Human Rights, July 26 - July 29. Conference participants will have five plenary sessions, featuring a number of Canadian, American, and internationally-renowned keynote speakers, and workshop sessions organized around the conference's five themes: Essential Rights, Global Issues; the Diverse LGBT community; Participation in Society; and Creating Social Change. In addition, several sub-conferences are planned including: "Workers Out!" the labor unions' examination of LGBT rights in the workplace; and "Out for Business," the Quebec Gay Chamber of Commerce-led networking effort aimed at chambers of commerce, professionals and business associations in the LGBT community. Montreal's Anglican bishop Barry Clarke will hold OutMass: celebrating diversity.

¶3. Canadian federal, provincial, and municipal officials have made supportive statements, highlighting a policy of tolerance and inclusion. Keynote speakers include UNHCHRQs Louise Arbour (who also wrote an OpEd and gave media interviews on the importance of LGBT rights), Montreal Mayor Gerald Tremblay, Canadian Olympic Medalist Mark Tewksbury, Gene Robinson, Bishop of the New Hampshire Episcopal Church, and Irshad Manji, New York Times columnist and author of "The Trouble with Islam Today." The mood at the opening plenary session that focused on LGBT rights in the U.S. and Canada was positive; one participant noted to Econoff that it was "uplifting to be surrounded by so many people from so many different countries" focused on taking positive steps for the protection of LGBT rights. Mark Tewksbury received a

standing ovation after speaking about the need to break through the "culture of silence about homosexuality and sport" and praised Montreal as a city where "[LGBT people] are not just tolerated, we are celebrated." Conference organizers told Consulate officials they hope the legacy of the conference's "Declaration of Montreal" will be an action plan to mobilize the United Nations and national governments to support LGBT rights.

¶4. The OutGames stemmed from a dispute between the Federation of Gay Games and organizers in Montreal, which had been slated to host the 7th Annual Gay Games. The Federation of Gay Games, which had seen its last two games turn into money losing ventures, were not inclined to include a human rights conference and other side events to the 2006 Games, opting instead to keep them as pure sporting events, and moved the location of the 7th Annual Gay Games (which concluded this week) to Chicago. Unlike the 7th Annual Gay Games, OutGames events will cater to all levels of athletic ability and include traditional sports such as basketball, rowing, and track and field, as well as same sex versions of figure skating, ballroom dancing and synchronized swimming. The week-long program of 35 sport competitions will take place at 40-plus different venues throughout Montreal, including facilities originally built for the 1976 Olympic Games. The opening and closing ceremonies will be held at the Olympic Stadium (Consulate rep to attend) and will be broadcast by Radio-Canada. Viger Square, dubbed "Rendez-Vous Square," will serve as a hub for the "cultural portion" of the OutGames, where participants will gather for informal musical, dance, and social activities.

¶5. A special two-for-one ticket sale promotion for the

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opening ceremony immediately sent waves of concern in a city sensitive about grand sports events deficits. (Mayor Tremblay already has a projected \$400 million budget deficit; Montrealeers still remember the huge deficit of the 1976 Olympics, which was only recently paid off, as well as last summer's World Aquatic Competition that also fell short.) OutGames president Louise Roy said at the opening press conference that the OutGames had already broken even, and that private financing had already covered the extravagant opening ceremony planned, though she did not disclose financial details or percentages of public/private support. Some media speculated that the low ticket sales and the absence of a last-minute surge in hotel reservations provide proof that the event will not live up to the organizers' expectations and hype, though "breaking even is already ahead" for Montreal finances. (Note: While one columnist cited a strong Canadian dollar and gasoline prices as contributing to a drop in summer tourism, no reference to WHTI requirements or border security issues was made.) Conference organizers also explained to Consulate representatives that they had received a combination of federal, provincial, and municipal funding as well as significant private industry support. Several prominent Canadian and American companies, such as CGI, Pepsi, Speedo, Bell Canada, GlaxoSmithKline and Intel, are among the variety of official sponsors.

Quebec's Track Record and Montreal's Capitalizing on LGBT Rights

¶6. Montreal has already attained the reputation of North America's "City of Festivals" and hosts a large and vibrant Gay and Lesbian community. It has a neighborhood known as the "Gay Village," that boasts a wide variety of antique shops, bistros, pubs, and night clubs. The city has been playing up the appeal of its Gay Village in its advertising campaigns, hoping to draw more Gay and Lesbian travelers (even dedicating an entire section of its tourism website to "gay friendly accommodation") and has been highlighting the OutGames as evidence of the city's progressive and open

nature. Each year, between 900,000 and one million gay and lesbian visitors come to Montreal. Even beyond the rainbow-flagged and banner-lined streets of the gay quarter, souvenir shops throughout the city are giving equal treatment to OutGames apparel and souvenirs, prominently placing them as they would for Montreal's established cultural and sporting events. Montreal media is reporting that shop owners are already seeing a business boom.

17. OutGames organizers explained how over the years, Montreal's special spirit of openness and acceptance between the general public and the LGBT community made Montreal the perfect place for this event. They explained also how the gay-friendly environment has been further nurtured by numerous government policies. In 1977, Quebec was the first government in the world (other than a city) to include sexual orientation in its anti-discrimination legislation. In 2002, Quebec also legalized same-sex union. In July 2005, Quebec became the first jurisdiction in the world to have laws that clearly grant full legal equality to same-sex couples at both the federal and provincial levels. Pursuing pro-LGBT human rights policies and promoting LGBT tourism and business opportunities are likely to continue to be essential parts of Montreal's urban identity based on pluralism, social inclusion and tolerance.

Sheaffer